

# Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities Program

## HealthChoices Program

Annual Report – FY 19-20 & FY 20-21



County Services Center  
633 Court Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Reading, PA 19601  
610-478-3271  
[www.co.berks.pa.us](http://www.co.berks.pa.us)





## A message from the Administrator...

The last two years have been truly unforgettable. So many aspects of our lives changed in very little time. For so many individuals and families, who utilize service or receive supports through our mental health, developmental disability, early intervention or other social service delivery systems, these changes have been drastic with the impact on their daily lives hard to capture. What we had all hoped would be a very temporary situation, has lasted far longer than expected. We all continue to do our best to adjust to what is our new normal.

Despite all the hardship, our delivery systems have also realized many positives from living through this experience. We have seen unprecedented, swift decision making at all levels of government allowing for rule changes related to how services could be provided as well as how they were funded. The quick ramp up of telehealth services allowed for many critical services to continue to be provided, albeit very different from in person support. Providers showed just how creative and committed they were in keeping strong connections with individuals and families that they recognized were feeling the brunt of lost routines, social isolation and the need to stay safe. Direct Care Professionals working in homes in the community and in our residential locations showed amazing resilience continuing to provide essential care to those most in need, often over long stretches without breaks.

As we make slow transitions with work, school, and daily life, now more than ever it's especially important to remember to focus on our collective well-being, including both our physical and mental health. Look out for your family, friends, coworkers, caregivers, neighbors and yourself. There are a wide array of services, available either through in-person or telehealth, to support individuals and families through whatever challenges they are experiencing.

Finally, thanks to all for your incredible endurance and patience. We can't anticipate for sure what lies ahead or for how long. We know, however, that with continued collaboration from all our stakeholders and partners we will come out of this experience stronger because of the many new ideas, tools and resources identified and implemented. Looking forward to what this next year brings before us.

*Pam Seaman*

# Team Members

**Pam Seaman, MPA**

*Administrator*

**Michele Ruano-Weber, MA**

*Deputy Administrator*

**Gregory Gerdeman, LSW**

*CASSP Coordinator*

**Tracy Evans**

*Administrative Coordinator*

**Lydia Singley, LSW**

*HealthChoices Program Director*

**Rebecca Dorsey, MPA**

*HealthChoices Quality Officer*

**Tiffany Hunter, BA**

*Fiscal Manager*

**Mary Ertel, BS**

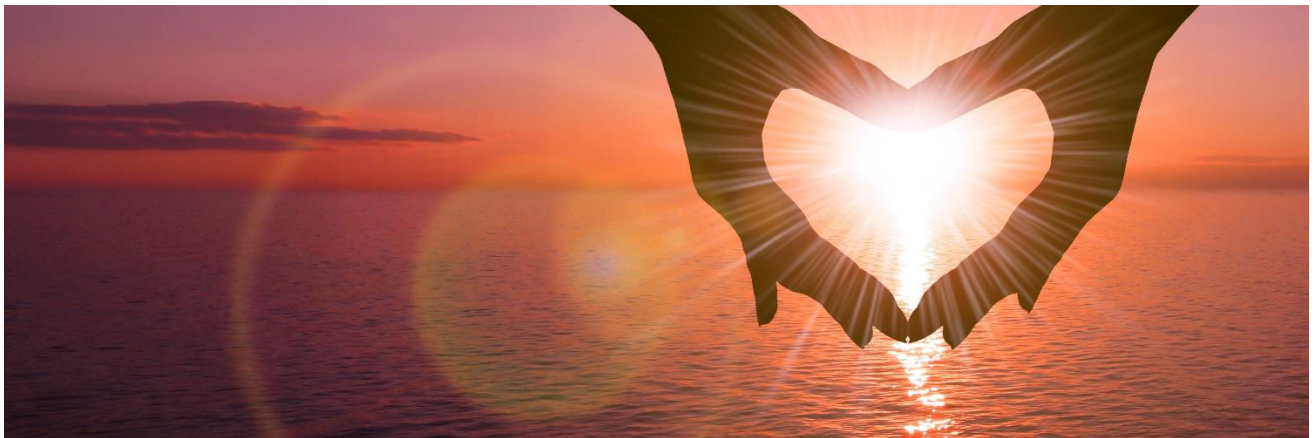
*Fiscal Officer*



*We also would like to acknowledge all service providers for their efforts in delivering quality services to the residents of Berks County.*

# WHAT IS OUR MISSION

To provide quality care as well as the delivery of efficient public services and supports for individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities so that they can increase their opportunities and abilities to lead lives of dignity and independence. Acknowledging that recovery is an ongoing process, MH/DD is committed to promoting personal growth, choice, and inclusion of consumers in their community.



# MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

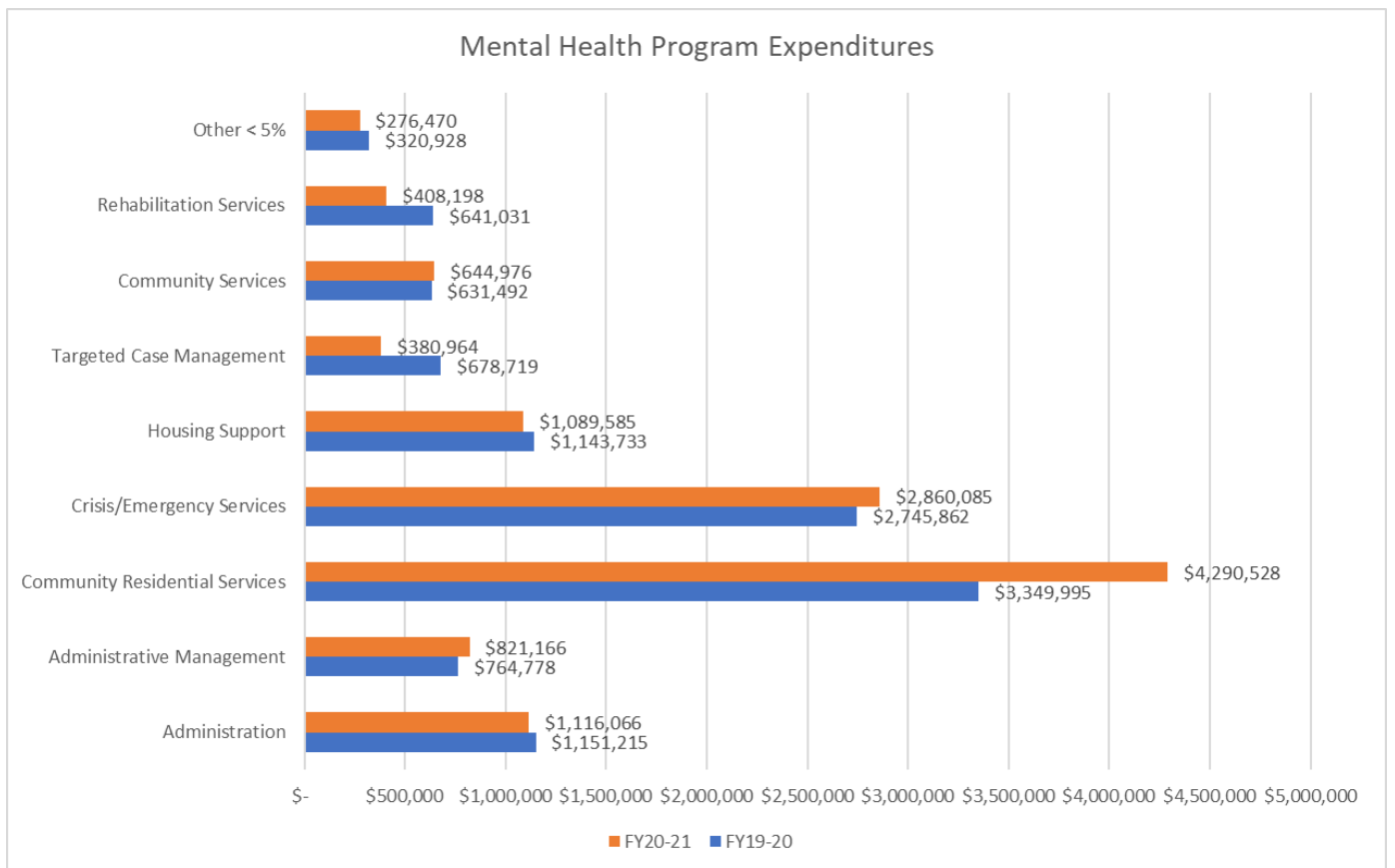


A wide range of services are available to meet the needs of individuals with mental health concerns.

People with mental illness can best achieve positive change and recovery when treatment and supportive services are guided by each person's goals, preferences, strengths and needs. Involvement of family is encouraged.

Services are delivered by local provider agencies under contract with the County. They are designed to be accessible, responsive, culturally appropriate and cost effective.

	FY19-20	FY20-21
Total Served	8402	7627
Total Expenditures	\$11,427,753	\$11,888,038





## **Collaboration with Berks Connections Pre-Trial Services (BCPS)**

Berks County MH/DD Program has worked collaboratively with Berks Connections Pre-Trial Services (BCPS) for several years to provide funding toward vocational programming for individuals re-entering the community and workforce. Through this partnership and shared involvement in other re-entry planning, conversations about the multiple barriers in seeking employment that individuals face when returning to the community especially when faced with a serious mental illness began to take shape. In the spring of 2019, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, invited submission of forensic pilot projects for funding considerations. Understanding that employment is so much more than “just a job” was largely the reason why the MH/DD Program chose to submit a proposal to OMHSAS with this focus. Besides income, a job offers many other taken for granted benefits such as social identity, status, social contact, structure to a day, personal achievement that are often areas of struggle for individuals with a serious mental illness.

BCPS began supporting individuals with serious mental illness for this pilot project in September 2020. The project focuses on assessment of an individual’s past education, training, work history, computer literacy, development of an Individualized Employment Plan, teaching readiness for work and other pre-employment skills including supporting pro-social opportunities such as volunteering as a transition into work. Supports continue through the employment phase beginning with recruiting employers who are understanding and invested in the unique needs of the target population, job matching, on-boarding, training for employers and ongoing follow-up as needed with the individual. The program is designed to be uniquely paced for each individual participating.

Funding for this program, which was initially provided by OMHSAS for a pilot year, has continued with block grant funding. Nineteen individuals have engaged in this program from the first admission through the end of fiscal year, June 2021, with several individuals successfully employed.



# DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES PROGRAM



The MH/DD Program oversees the Berks County Developmental Disabilities Program.

## **FY19/20**



554 enrolled – Consolidated Waiver Program  
143 enrolled – Community Living Waiver  
447 enrolled – Person Family Direct Support Waiver  
165 enrolled – Base services

## **FY20/21**



552 enrolled – Consolidated Waiver Program  
145 enrolled – Community Living Waiver  
455 enrolled – Person Family Direct Support Waiver  
143 enrolled – Base services

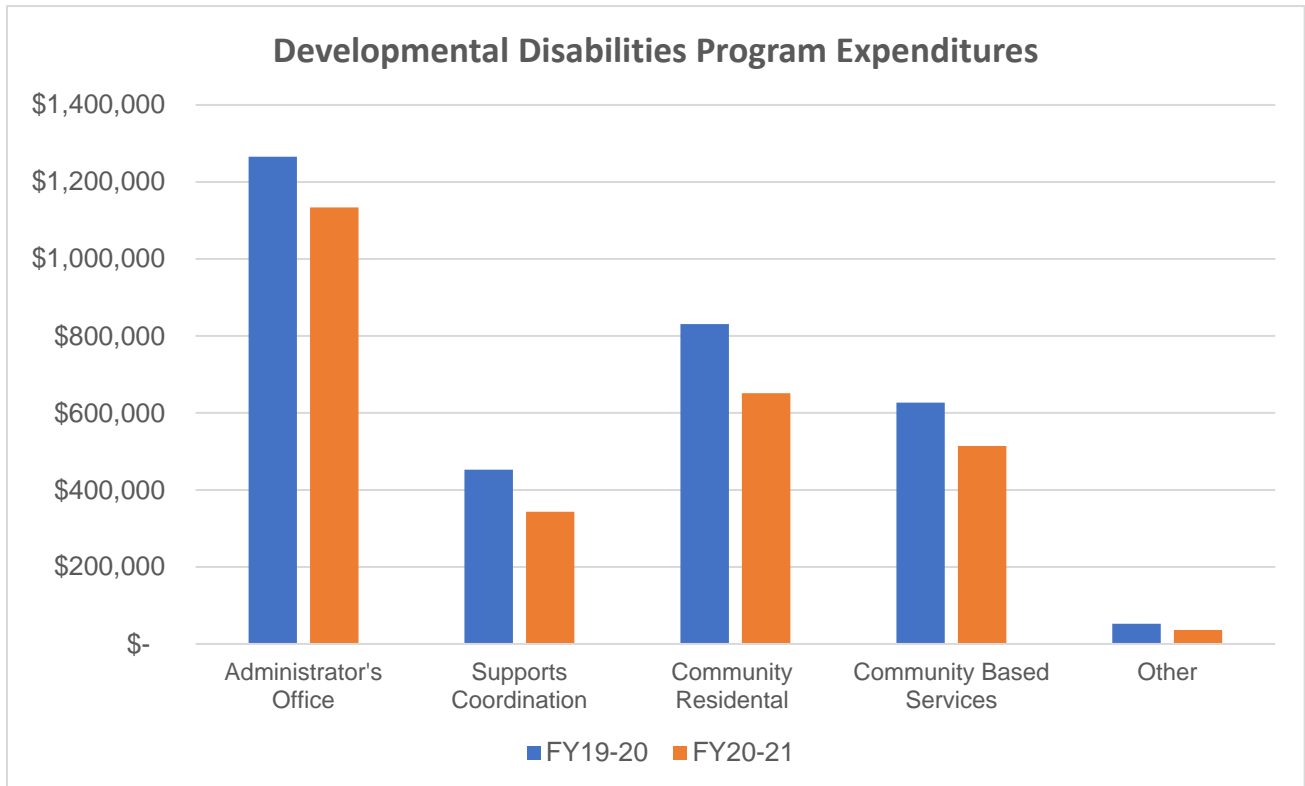


This year, providers had to employ creative strategies to engage individuals during the midst of the pandemic. With Day Programs closures, individuals were introduced to the concept of virtual activities such as yoga and art classes. Virtual meetings were held between consumers who typically attended day program together so they would have opportunities to remain connected with friends during these unprecedented times. There were even staff who deployed to family homes to provide some habilitation services individually since group gatherings could not occur.

The Direct Support Professionals (DSP) worked diligently to provide 24/7 care to the individuals they served in our Community Homes. There are 11 Providers and 451 individuals that reside in community homes across Berks County. COVID infections for the residents and the DSPs took a toll on everyone but despite that, staff persevered to ensure the health and safety of the individuals they support. They are to be commended as front-line workers!

There was a concerted effort to provide access to vaccination clinics early in the pandemic to protect our vulnerable citizens. The number of infections did decrease as a result of that effort.

	FY19-20	FY20-21
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$3,228,460</b>	<b>\$2,678,606</b>



# EARLY INTERVENTION



The Early Intervention Program provides therapy services for infants from birth to age three who are experiencing developmental delays.

The Providers and Service Coordinators had to quickly adapt to providing services in a remote environment due to the pandemic. Therapists were able to perfect their coaching model strategies to teach families and care givers how to provide services to their children within the safety of their own home environment.

Families were given a choice between in person services or virtual services in the Spring of 2021. The number of children served for 19/20 was 991 and for 20/21 it was 909.

Coaching can be used during natural family routines to help families identify strategies, practice them, reflect on their interactions with their children, problem solve challenges, and receive supportive feedback.

*To make a referral for early intervention services, contact 610-236-0530 and ask for the Early Intervention Intake Department.*



The Berks County MH/DD Program along with the Berks County HealthChoices Program recognizes the importance of having a trauma informed workforce. There is a recognition of the connection between adverse childhood experiences and impaired social, cognitive, and emotional development which could lead to risk taking behaviors, disease, and even early death.

To that end, the Program partnered with Lakeside Global Institute to provide multiple trainings to the workforce within the County. Early Intervention professionals along with parents were introduced to the concepts of Trauma for Care Givers training and the New Eyes Training was to raise awareness about the impact of trauma and toxic stress and to encourage resilience and skills that reduce stress. 20 individuals attended each event. The Trauma of Racism was explored in two-part segments, and it reached 149 participants.

The MH/DD Program partnered with the Berks County Intermediate Unit, the Office of Attorney General's Office, and Lakeside Global Institute in the Fall of 2019 to provide training to 137 education professionals over a two-day period around trauma informed care.

14 Non-profit leaders benefitted from an Overview of Trauma Training as well as education regarding Vicarious Trauma in the workplace as human services professionals.

The HealthChoices Program funded a virtual Lakeside Trauma Training for Berks County Children and Youth Service (CYS), Probation, Aging and Blended Case Management agencies in October 2020, with a total of 282 participants.



# 2019 Keeping Kids Safe Trauma Summit

**Create a Culture of Kindness**  
A bullying and violence abatement program

Rachel's Challenge is based on the life and writings of Rachel Joy Scott who was the first victim of the Columbine school shootings in 1999.

Rachel's Challenge exists to equip and inspire individuals to replace acts of violence, bullying, and negativity with acts of respect, kindness, and compassion.

**Keeping Kids Safe**  
**Wednesday**  
**October 22, 2019**  
**8 a.m. to 12 p.m.**

**www.berksiu.org/safekids**  
**BCIU** Berks County Intermediate Unit  
an educational service agency

**BERKS COUNTY**  
MIDDLE DISTRICT  
MH/DD PROGRAM

*"Compassion is the greatest form of love humans have to offer. I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People don't realize how far a little kindness will go."*  
Rachel Joy Scott

In October 2019, the MH/DD Program and the BCIU sponsored speaker, Michael Scott. He is the brother of Rachel Scott who was the first victim killed in the Columbine tragedy 20 years ago.

“Rachel’s Challenge” is a foundation that strives to bring positive school climates to fruition as well as delivering a message of kindness.

The almost 200 participants were challenged to develop an action plan in their school district to foster a more inclusive and positive environment as bullying is a known risk factor in violence as well as suicidal behavior in our youth.

The MH/DD Program is proud of its extensive partnership with the BCIU and looks forward to future endeavors.

*For more information, please contact the MH/DD Program at extension 6580.*

# CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SERVICE SYSTEM PROGRAM (CASSP)



**Vision Statement:** To assess, develop, improve, and evaluate a comprehensive, coordinated and collaborative system of services for children, adolescents and their families with multi-system needs.



The Berks County MH/DD Program was fortunate to welcome new CASSP Coordinator, Greg Gerdeman, LSW, during the height of the pandemic. Greg came into this new role with many years of valuable experience in the child welfare system and youth mental health treatment facilities. Since Greg's start occurred while many schools and organizations were still operating remotely, his opportunity to get out into the community for in person introductions has been limited. If you have not met Greg yet, please reach out to him at 610-478-3271, ext. 6584 or [ggerdeman@countyofberks.com](mailto:ggerdeman@countyofberks.com) for any assistance you need with complex, child and adolescent situations.



# HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HAP)

## HUMAN SERVICES DEVELOPMENT FUND (HSDF)



When the pandemic became a reality in Berks County, shelter capacity plummeted due to health and safety considerations. The County applied for a HAP waiver to house individuals in hotel rooms for a period of two weeks with an opportunity to extend the stay if housing was not found during that time.

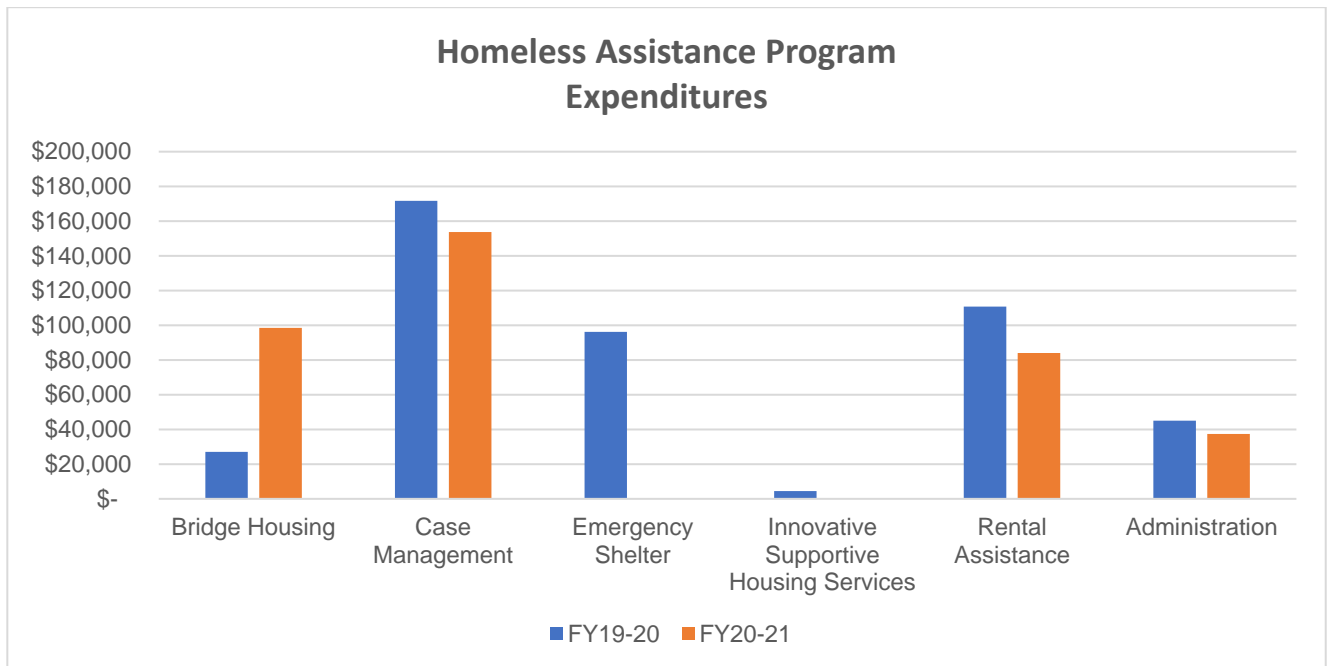
That program grew into the development of The Gateway to Stability Program which is a short-term program (1 to 28 days) committed to helping Berks County families who are experiencing homelessness for the first time or after a long period of stability.

Families qualifying for this program would be assessed and referred through coordinated entry. This is a short-term program so participants must have a reasonable plan for resolving their homeless status within the 28-day time frame.

132 individuals were assisted in 19-20. It is anticipated that 252 individuals will be assisted in 21-22.

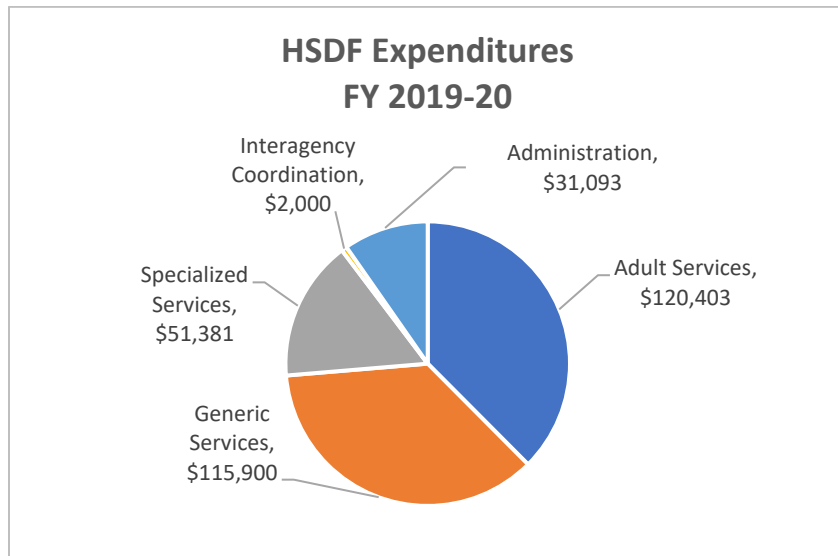
Locally, the **Homeless Assistance Program** (HAP) money was allocated to the Berks Coalition to End Homelessness, which is a private not-for-profit organization that is the lead agency for HUD homelessness services in Berks County. HAP is administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS) to assist individuals who are experiencing homelessness and to prevent homelessness.

	FY19-20	FY20-21
Total Served	504	819
Total Expenditures	\$ 455,351	\$ 373,544

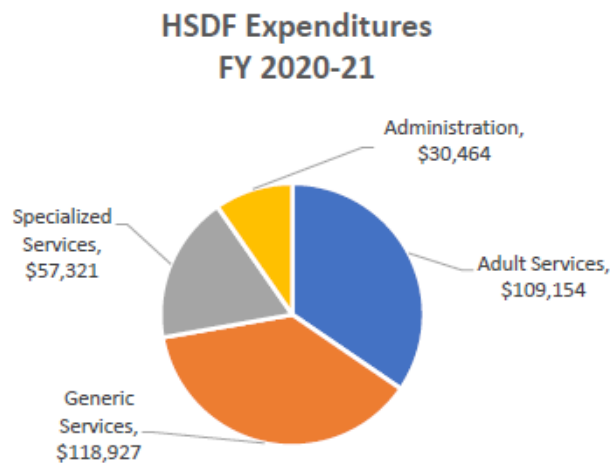


The **Human Service Development Fund (HSDF)** is administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS) for low-income individuals. It relies on counties to direct funding to fill gaps within the human services system.

**Total Expenditures - \$320,177    Total served - 988**



**Total Expenditures - \$315,866    Total served - 734**



# BERKS COUNTY SUICIDE PREVENTION TASK FORCE



The Suicide Prevention Task Force was able to touch 5,120 individuals prior to the commencement of the pandemic. The remainder of the in-person events were Community and Employee Health Fairs and Rotary events.

Community groups were provided opportunities to view the Suicide Prevention movie entitled, “The Ripple Effect”.

Supplies and educational literature were provided to community groups and school districts upon request.

The Task Force sponsored billboards, bus advertisements, and Public Service Announcements to remind people to reach out for assistance during the pandemic.

In the Spring of 2021, the Task Force in partnership with the Reading Parking Authority were able to install signs in all of the parking garages directing people in Crisis to the County hotline number and the web site at [www.ruokberks.com](http://www.ruokberks.com).

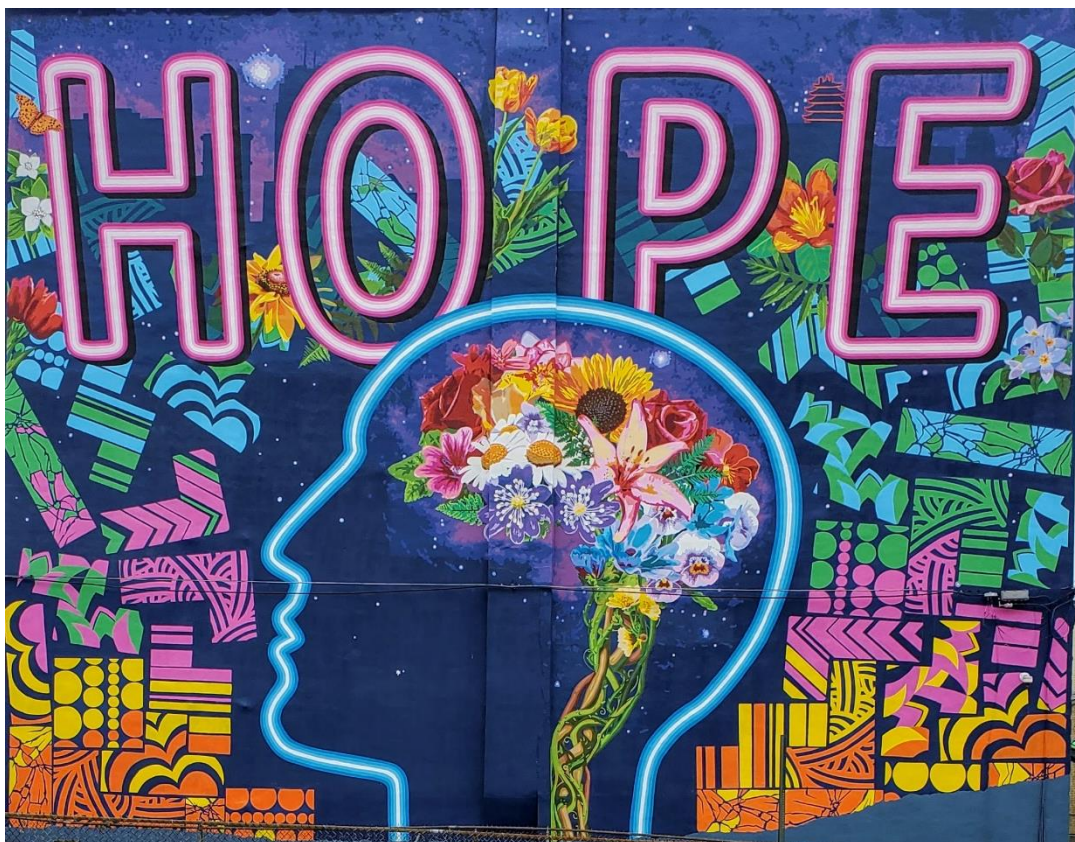




In the Summer of 2021, the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Strike out the Stigma game was held in collaboration with the Fightin Phils. There were 2,500 people who participated in this event.



The Task Force was also involved in the painting of a Community Mural which will be placed on the rear of Threshold’s Mosaic House building. It’s a message of HOPE that suicide is treatable, and help is available.



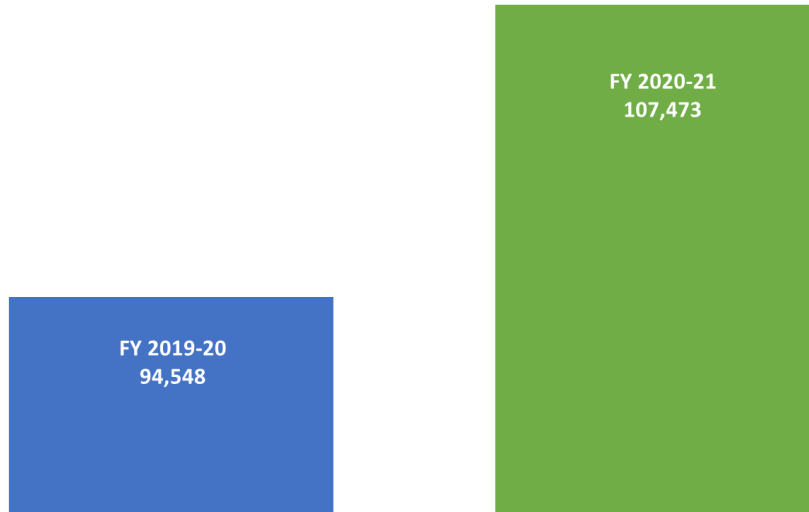
# BERKS COUNTY HEALTHCHOICES PROGRAM



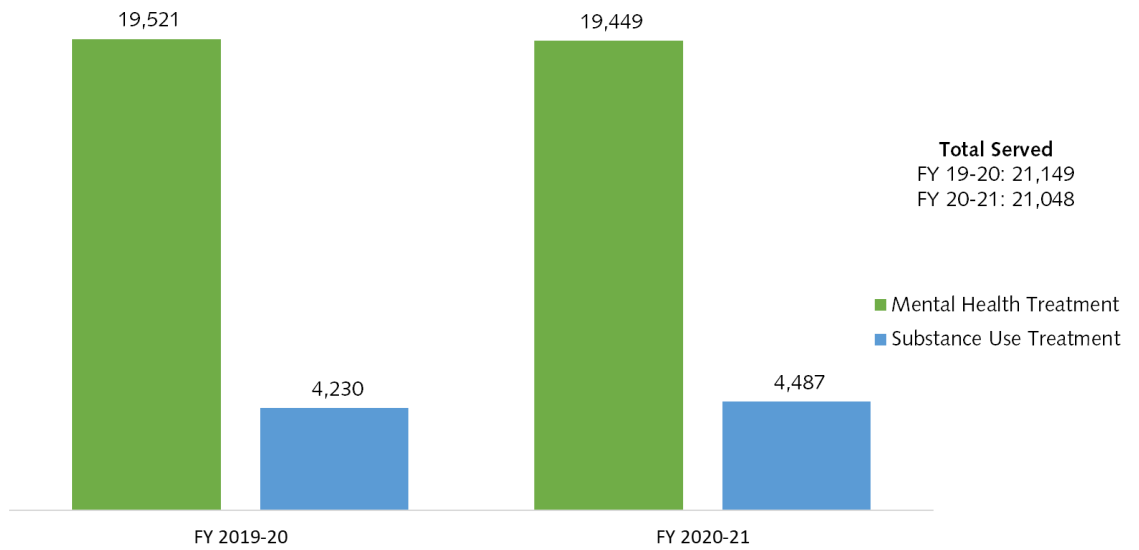
HealthChoices is Pennsylvania's mandatory managed care program for Medical Assistance (MA) consumers. The program is designed to improve access to and quality of care for MA consumers throughout Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) has contracted directly with Berks County to manage the HealthChoices behavioral healthcare services to County residents since October 2001. The county, in turn, sub-contracts with a managed care organization (MCO), Community Care Behavioral Health (CCBH), to manage behavioral healthcare services on behalf of the county HealthChoices Program. The MCO's responsibilities include provider network development, utilization management, quality management, claims management, information systems, reporting, member services, preventative and outreach.

HealthChoices Eligible Members as of June 30th  
 Fiscal Years 2019-20 and 2020-21  
 14% Increase in Membership

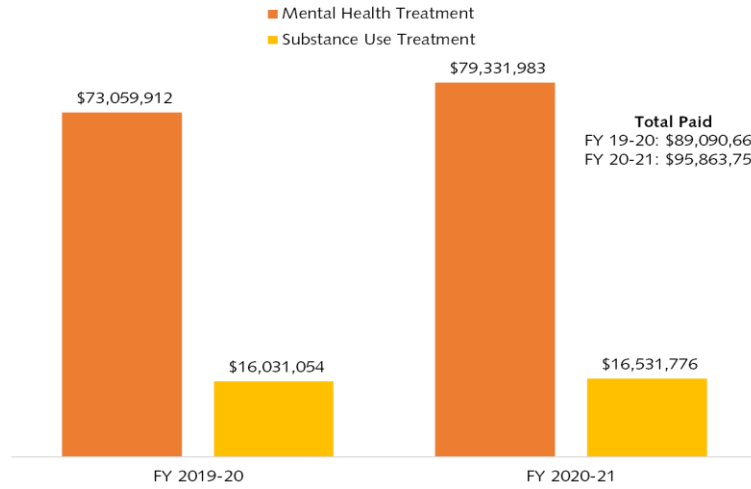


HealthChoices Members Served  
 Fiscal Years 2019-20 and 2020-21

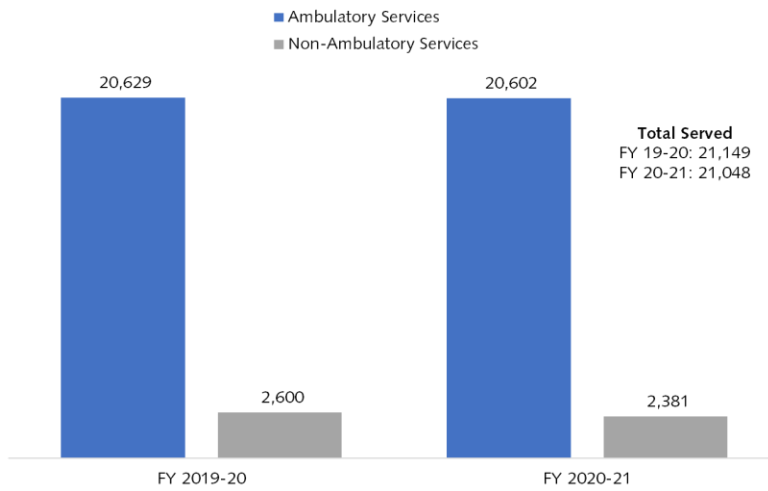




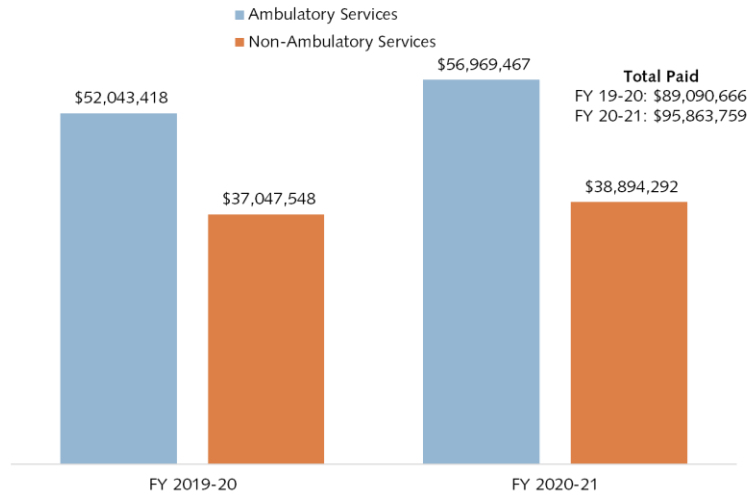
HealthChoices Amounts Paid  
Fiscal Years 2019-20 and 2020-21



HealthChoices Members Served  
Fiscal Years 2019-20 and 2020-21  
Mental Health and Substance Use Services



HealthChoices Amounts Paid  
Fiscal Years 2019-20 and 2020-21  
Mental Health and Substance Use Services



# HealthChoices Initiatives



**Telehealth:** In the beginning of the pandemic, OMHSAS issued guidance on providing ambulatory services via telehealth. Community Care Behavioral Health (Berks HealthChoices Managed Care Organization) has tracked telehealth utilization with results showing that it has been used the most in outpatient mental health. While telehealth is provided in other levels of care, the volume is less for a variety of reasons. For some services such as Peer Support, consumers were not comfortable with telehealth and for others such as IBHS and Family Based, it was challenging to effectively provide services via telehealth. To mitigate financial losses incurred by providers, Berks HealthChoices and Community Care implemented Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA's) for all levels of care. These APA's served to maintain financial solvency for the providers and to date, remain in place.

# Service Expansion

**Windmill Forensic Diversion Program:** Berks MH/DD, HealthChoices and Community Care developed a 6-bed forensic Community Residential Rehabilitation (CRR) program operated by PCS Mental Health, which opened in June 2021. The target population focuses on forensically involved individuals with a serious mental illness who are diverting from more restrictive levels of care such as forensic/civil state hospital admission or incarceration. This is a voluntary, clinically intense program that is staffed 24 hours and provides various levels of treatment and support on-site, including therapy, medication management, psychosocial rehabilitation, and certified peer specialist services. The average length of stay is expected to be longer in duration due to the chronicity of the target population. To date, 5 Berks HealthChoices members have been served.



**RTF-A:** Berks HealthChoices developed a 6-bed Adult Residential treatment Facility (RTF-A) operated by Threshold Rehabilitation Services, which opened in July 2020. The program start-up was funded through a HealthChoices Reinvestment Plan. The target population is 18-25-year old's with extensive treatment histories including RTF and Inpatient stays, who may be transitioning out of Children and Youth (CYS) or HealthChoices placements with little to no family support and without the skill set to live independently. They may present with physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors and/or PTSD, may have potential treatment burnout from their lengthy treatment histories and be treatment resistant, and/or may not acknowledge or be knowledgeable about their diagnosis due to their developmental age. The goal of the program is to assist these members in managing symptoms/ behaviors that place them at risk for more restrictive levels of care. This is a voluntary, clinically intense program that is staffed 24 hours and provides various levels of treatment and support on-site, including therapy, medication management, psychosocial rehabilitation, independent living skills, and certified peer specialist services. The average length of stay is expected to be longer in duration due to the needs of the target population. To date, 11 Berks HealthChoices members have been served.

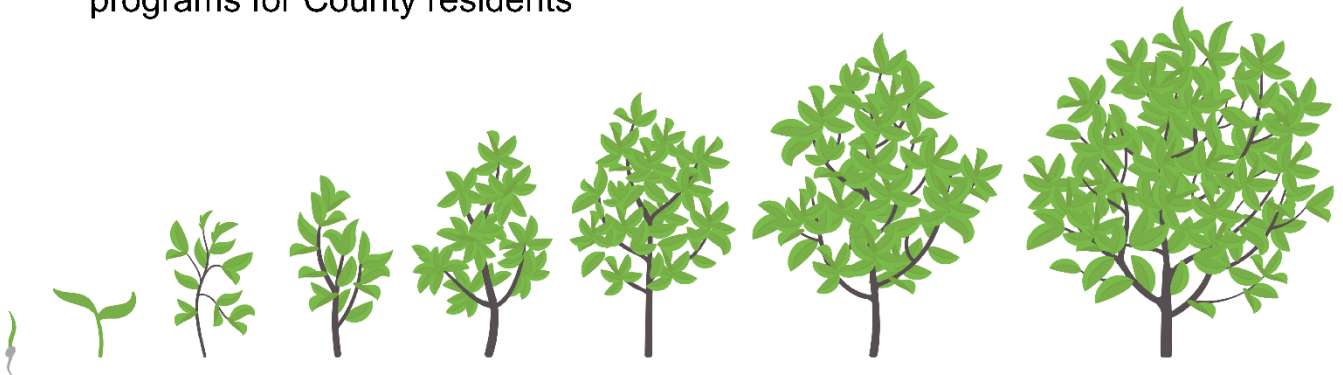
# HealthChoices Reinvestment ...

## Building Capacity,

## Reinvesting Savings

Since 2002, the Berks County HealthChoices Program has developed and enhanced mental health and substance use treatment programs for County residents

# \$28,754,007







County Services Center, 633 Court Street, 8th Floor, Reading, PA 19601  
Website: [www.countyofberks.com](http://www.countyofberks.com)

**Berks County Board of Commissioners:**

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Kevin S. Barnhardt, Vice-Chairman  
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